

Student Services Support of Developmental Education

GREGORY STEWART
UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI

GENNINE BREWER
NORTHERN KENTUCKY
UNIVERSITY

DIANNE BROWN WRIGHT
FLORIDA ATLANTIC
UNIVERSITY

The process of transitioning from secondary to postsecondary education can be very complex and challenging. Many freshmen students are coming to college underprepared and in need of developmental education. The role of student services is to assist these students and their families with this important transition to postsecondary education by offering specialized services such as new student orientation programs and welcome week activities, and establishing First Year Offices. This article also explains the role of the Center for Access and Transition which was established by the University of Cincinnati to provide services to students who do not meet the criteria for direct admission to the baccalaureate program.

Many freshmen students are coming to college underprepared and in need of remedial course work. In fall 2000, over three-fourths of institutions that enrolled freshmen offered at least one remedial reading, writing, or mathematics course. Public two-year colleges enrolled a higher proportion of entering freshmen in remedial courses (42%) than did other types of institutions such as private four-year (12%) and public four-year (20%). Public four year institutions were more likely than private four-year institutions to offer one or more remedial reading, writing, or mathematics courses (80 vs. 59 percent) (Pasdad & Lewis, 2003).

At that time, 60% of the institutions offering remedial coursework indicated that the average time a student spent in remediation was less than one year, 35% indicated the average time was one year, and five percent reported an average time of more than one year. In response to this need for remedial coursework, many American colleges and universities are developing specialized programs to assist these at-risk students with the transition from high school to college.

THE ROLE OF STUDENT SERVICES

The process of transitioning from secondary to postsecondary education can be complex and challenging. The role of student services is to assist students and their families with this important transition. Numerous

American colleges and universities offer a variety of first year programs such as new student orientation, academic advising, and an early alert system to support student success. The University of Cincinnati (UC) states, “the mission of Student Affairs and Services is to enroll students with diverse backgrounds and abilities and to assist them to reach their full potential. The Division works in partnership with faculty, staff, and the surrounding community to enhance student learning inside and outside the classroom” (University of Cincinnati, 2005, p. 1). Major responsibilities include:

- » Identify and respond to the educational, developmental, and career needs of students;
- » Provide students with experience to enhance their attitudes and skills that lead to success in and outside the classroom;
- » Encourage self-awareness and individual exploration and personal responsibility;
- » Promote diversity, civility, and civic involvement;
- » Promote purposeful and healthy interpersonal relationships; and
- » Promote values that enhance character development.

STUDENT CONNECTIONS

Research shows that it is essential for new students to make an early connection to their new educational home. This is especially true for students who enter college needing remediation. It is of great importance to ensure that these students are connected to the institution and establish an academic and social support system. This valuable connection provides many benefits for the student and the university. “Research examining college student attrition advises that the first year student’s most critical transition period occurs during the first semester, therefore programs and services designed to combat student attrition should be front-loaded” (Singer, 2003, p. 53).

One of the most common ways to achieve this goal of an early connection is through new student orientation programs. There are many common experiences among freshmen students, such as confusion regarding university policies and procedures, financial concerns and the need to find a good balance between their academic and social activities. Orientation plays a crucial role in helping students learn about their new environment by providing an introduction to academics, services, and activities. At orientation sessions remedial students often receive special assistance from advisors and counselors who help them plan their schedules and realistically appraise their chances of success based on

standardized and/or placement test scores. Remedial students benefit greatly from an introduction to the specialized offices and services that are in place to provide academic support.

At UC, attendance at the Bearcat Bound Orientation is required for all new freshmen students in order to register for classes. The comprehensive two-day program includes placement testing, information sessions about policies, procedures, and graduation requirements, small group discussions about college life facilitated by upper-class student leaders, and community building activities. The program concludes with academic advising and course registration. The separate, but concurrent Parent and Family Orientation covers information on financing the student's education, how to stay actively involved in the student's learning process and Parent Association requirements.

Along with orientation sessions, many institutions conduct welcome week activities. Tinto's (1993) model of student persistence emphasizes the importance of academic and social integration within the university community. He argues that students who are more involved and connected to their classes, fellow students, and campus are more likely to persist. Studies have shown that students form critical impressions about the institution they will attend during the first week of school.

At Ohio State University, Welcome Week takes place the first week of classes during the fall semester. The week is full of activities such as rallies, pizza parties, movie nights and dances designed to welcome new students to the university in a festive atmosphere. Each day a wide range of student services offices, academic departments and student organizations host various fun and informative activities to introduce their services to new students. Also during this week sororities and fraternities hold "Rush" or membership intake programs. These types of programs provide additional support to remedial students and offer a way for these students to become connected, build a community, and access student services that are in place to provide the support necessary for college success.

At Northern Kentucky University with 14,000 students and 2,000 freshmen, the Office of New Student Orientation sponsors a welcome carnival for freshmen held during the second week of fall classes called Freshfusion. Freshfusion includes greetings by the University President and the student body president, and gives students an opportunity to show their class and school spirit in a pep rally type atmosphere. It also includes an outdoor cookout and fun activities sponsored by various

Student Affairs offices and student organizations. This program is designed to build class unity, allow students to meet one another, and gather valuable information in a festive atmosphere.

In addition to student orientation and welcome week activities, many American colleges and universities have also established First Year offices to work with students throughout their first year of college. These offices provide programming to engage and challenge freshmen with the goal of increasing freshman retention rates. They take a special interest in remedial students and work closely with developmental education faculty to provide specialized programs and courses to meet their developmental needs.

UC CENTER FOR ACCESS AND TRANSITION

UC is perhaps unique in its emphasis on scholarship and research, while maintaining a deep commitment to accessible education. All UC baccalaureate colleges maintain a selective admission standard. The minimum admission requirement in 2004 was a high school degree or general education diploma (GED). The UC Center for Access and Transition is an open-admission academic unit designed to provide academic instruction and advising for undergraduate students—with the potential of academic success—who do not meet the criteria for direct admission to a UC baccalaureate program. The students do not meet entrance requirements for a variety of reasons, perhaps a low placement test score or the need to enhance skills in a subject area. In fall 2004, 643 students came to the UC but did not enter any of the “traditional” colleges. These students were admitted into the Center for Access and Transition. This year 754 students enrolled in the Center (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
Comparison between students entering Center in fall 2004 and 2005

	Entered fall 2004 N = 643	Entering fall 2005 N = 754
Average GPA:	2.31	2.27
Average ACT:	17.35	16.47
Average SAT:	870	833.55
Percent entering from Cincinnati Public Schools	13.3%	18.8%
Percent Ethnicity		
Caucasian	57.4%	46.6%
African American	34.3%	44.5%

The Center's faculty provide specialized instruction in math, writing, reading, oral communication and study skills supplemented by tutoring. Academic advisors provide intensive advising to focus the student on the academic skills needed to reach his or her goal. The aim is to have students fulfill requirements and develop their skills within one year, and then transition to a UC baccalaureate college. Examples of student services at the Center include:

Academic advising.

Academic advising is a key component in student success. Each student in the Center works with an advisor to complete a personalized learning agreement. This agreement is designed to help the student meet the requirements for his or her desired program. It may include required coursework, attendance at specific learning assistance workshops, or use of appropriate campus resources. It outlines the responsibilities of the student, including a required number of meetings with his or her academic advisor and the required completion of course progress reports during conferences with the student's instructors.

Counseling and information on college financial aid.

One third of the students in the Center qualify for the highest level of financial need. The Center has partnered with the Southwest Ohio Educational Opportunity Center (SOEOC) to provide counseling and information on college admissions and financial aid to qualified adults interested in entering postsecondary education. The SOEOC especially urges low-income adults whose parents have not received a college degree to apply for their free services. The SOEOC is funded by the U.S. Department of Education. In addition, special services are provided for students with high financial need who attend UC from Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS). The UC Pride Grant in combination with federal, state, and institutional aid equals the full cost of tuition and a book allowance for those graduates of CPS who might not otherwise be able to afford a college education. The Cincinnati Pride Grant coordinator has been given a satellite office in the Center for Access and Transition to enhance the progress of 80 students.

Promoting a love of reading through partnerships.

The Center, in collaboration with others, hosts a class day visit by an African-American author. The Center also partners with numerous UC units to co-sponsor a reading and book signing by a Hispanic author as part of Hispanic Heritage Month.

Increasing the retention and graduation rates for African-American students.

The African American Cultural and Research Center (AACRC) partnered with the Center to assist over 30 Center students enrolled in the AACRC Transition Program. Transitions, established in Autumn 2000, is a first year experience program that utilizes a Rites of Passage curriculum to foster a higher retention and graduation rate for Black Students at UC. The program assists students with their adjustment to college by providing workshops, mentors, and other activities so that participants are successful. This program connects Transitions' students with faculty, staff, upper class students and other members of the University family.

Assisting students with disabilities.

The Disability Services Office staff partners with the Center to empower students with disabilities through the delivery of reasonable accommodations and support services while educating the UC community to see beyond disabilities to the richness of inclusion. Qualified students receive reasonable accommodations and advocacy assistance on disability-related issues.

CONCLUSION

These programs have proven to be successful. They increase retention rates of first year students and develop students who are connected to the university, engaged in social and co-curricular activities, academically challenged, and ultimately more satisfied with their college experience. As shown in Table 2, during the fall 2005 semester, 32% of the students enrolled in the Center transitioned to the Baccalaureate colleges as opposed to only 10% of the students prior to the creation of the Center.

TABLE 2		
Status of students enrolled in the Center 2004-2005		
	Number of students	Percent of total
Total Transitioned & Enrolled	240	32%
Total Transitioned & Not Enrolled	51	7%
Total Withdrawn	154	20%
Total Academic Dismissals	116	15%
Still in CAT 05/06 & Enrolled	173	22%
Still in CAT 05/06 & Not Enrolled	18	4%
Transferred to other UC colleges	19	2%
Total	772	100%

The Center also serves as a resource for UC baccalaureate college students to enhance their academic skills. In 2004-05, over 1000 students in a UC baccalaureate college tested on the UC placement test to take one or more remedial courses from the Center. Thirty-eight percent (1,936) of the remedial course work seats in the Center were used by students from a UC baccalaureate college. These students also report tremendous success in progressing toward their undergraduate degree goals.

Overall, the Center has been successful in helping first year students before they are admitted to the baccalaureate programs and in helping students who are enrolled in UC who need to enhance their academic skills.

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Gregory Stewart is Director of the Center for Access and Transition at the University of Cincinnati. He has over 20 years experience in leading recruitment and retention programs. In addition, he has served as a faculty member teaching in social work, human services, and higher education administration at The University of Akron and Northern Kentucky University. His Ph.D. is in educational leadership student personnel from Ohio University.

Gennine Brewer serves as Assistant Director of Admissions at Northern Kentucky University. She has experience coordinating new student orientation programs and teaching University 101 courses. Ms. Brewer received her Bachelor's degree in Biology from Xavier University of Louisiana and a Masters Degree in Educational Administration with a focus in Higher Education from The University of Akron.

Dianne Brown Wright is an Associate Professor, Department of Educational Leadership at Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, Florida—Davie Campus. Her Doctorate is in Higher Education Administration and Management, with a sub-specialty in Policy, Planning, and Analysis, from Florida State University.